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INCREASE IN WYOMING ELK SHOWN BY AIRPLANE CENSUS

The southern elk herd of the Yellowstone National Park region is not only holding its own but has increased slightly in number since the last count five years ago, according to reports to the Biological Survey, U. S. Department of Agriculture, which administers a winter feeding ground for the elk in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. This year over a snow-covered ground, the elk census was made partly by airplane, in a cooperative effort of the Biological Survey, the Forest Service, and the Wyoming State Game Commission.

Five years ago a careful count disclosed 19,238 elk in the southern herd. The elk census just completed shows an increase of 617 in the 5-year period. The present total of 19,855 is still within the optimum number of 20,000 set by the Commission on the Conservation of the Elk, created by the President's Conference on Outdoor Recreation several years ago.

This year all the elk on the feeding grounds were enumerated as in the previous census, but members of the southern herd in the outlying districts were counted from airplane. A. C. McCain, supervisor of the Teton National Forest, reported that on the feeding grounds maintained by the Biological Survey and the State game commission there were 8,600 elk, and the airplane count returned 11,255 additional. "Under conditions prevailing in the Jackson Hole region," said Mr. McCain, "counting from an airplane is accomplished with remarkable

ease, speed, and accuracy, and we feel that after this experience we can count the Jackson Hole herd with accuracy any time we wish when there is snow on the ground. The total of 19,855 represents the number actually counted, absolutely no estimates or duplication."

On the four feeding grounds maintained by the Biological Survey in Jackson Hole, 7,921 elk were counted on the ground, with 679 additional on two feeding grounds maintained by the State game commission, a total of 8,600. The remaining 11,255 were spread out over the adjacent region, including national-forest areas.

The ground count of 7,021 on the Biological Survey's refuge lands showed 2,427 near headquarters, 1,877 on the Germain tract, 1,890 on the Ditwater tract, and 1,727 on the addition recently made through the interest of the Izaak Walton League of America. Reservation Protector Almer P. Nelson, in his report to the Biological Survey, stated that the number of elk resorting to the refuge for food this winter was probably at least 8,400, as some of the elk counted by airplane had been on the refuge earlier in the day, before the ground count was made.

Winter care of the elk is preserving these magnificent specimens of American deer, which range during the summer within the Yellowstone National Park, adjacent national forests, and an adjoining State game preserve. A disastrous winter eleven years ago, according to officials of the Biological Survey, had reduced the population of the southern Yellowstone elk herd to 9,346. The fluctuating of the numbers between 1921 and 1935 suggested that a continued increase might be expected, but the optimum of 20,000 has not yet been exceeded.

The Biological Survey, in addition to maintaining the winter elk

refuge and raising hay for winter feeding, has a biologist stationed at the headquarters who is studying problems concerned with the maintenance of the herd, involving nutritional matters as influenced by range conditions, disease prevention and control, and life-history investigations. The bureau is assembling other pertinent information on all other factors affecting fluctuations in the numbers of the elk. Plans call for maintaining the herd in numbers not to exceed 20,000, thus preventing the accumulation of an unwieldy surplus, with depletion of the range and threatened danger to the permanence of the herd as a whole through starvation on a large scale in unfavorable years.

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